

SERMON FOR ACIES OF LEGION OF MARY

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If you have ever heard a newscast from the Voice of America Radio, you probably heard a woman's voice announcing it. Most of the announcers on the "Voice of America" are women because the feminine voice with a higher vibration frequency is the only voice that will penetrate the electronic "jamming" produced by the Russians as man-made static to prevent the audible reception of the broadcasts behind the Iron Curtain where they are mainly beamed. Although Russia spends more than \$10,000,000 a year--more than the entire "Voice of America" budget--to jam broadcasts to Soviet Russia, she has yet to succeed. The reason? A woman's voice can still get through.

Throughout the centuries the Voice of God has been trying to penetrate the man-made static "jamming" His vital communication with mankind. Today this static is the worst it has ever been in the history of mankind--the static of materialism, secularism, indifferentism, and atheism. God chose a woman to get His messages across to us, because "a woman's voice can get through." The broadcasting station was in a tiny hamlet, probably Ain Karim, in the hill country of Juda. It was a cottage belonging to Elizabeth, the first to greet the announcer as "the Mother of my Lord." With this awesome introduction, the woman announcer began to speak. It was the delicate, soft, sweet, feminine voice of a humble maiden saying that her soul magnified the Lord, and that He regarded the humility of His handmaid, whom all generations would extol. The golden modulations of her celestial voice trilled, and spilled out the open doorway, rippled through the hill country of Juda, gained momentum as it rebounded against the vaulted heavens and reverberated down the corridors of time. It was heard by the Sacred Writer and immortalized in Scripture until the end of man's duration.

Yes, the word got through. And that is why we are here today--to fulfill that voiced prophecy that all generations would call her blessed--the prophecy that Legionaries daily repeat in the Catena. In prophesying her own exaltation, Mary was really presaging the glory that she would refer to God. For God saw that she who was eternally decreed to "communicate" Him to mankind by His Incarnation and birth through her, would logically also be the one through whom man would communicate back to God. Glory given to her as God's masterpiece would rightfully be communicated to God as the Divine Artist who gave her everything she is and has.

If we are here to fulfill a prophecy of Mary's exaltation--and hence God's--how are we to go about this? We turn to the experts in knowledge of Mary--the theologians called Mariologists--and they hasten to tell us that the best manner of honoring God's Mother and ours, Mary, is not merely by praying to her occasionally, or making periodic sacrifices for her, or by talking about her and praising her, but by dedicating or consecrating ourselves to her with a totality that embraces all we are and possess, in the past, the present and the future. A lover wraps his love in a package and gives it as a concrete gift to the beloved. The more precious

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the object one desires to give, the greater is the love. When that gift is one's entire self, with all that one is and has, there is nothing else to give, and the acme of love's expression is reached. This is why total consecration of self is the greatest gift we can give Mary to show that we honor her as "blessed," and hence, through this expression of our admiration of God's masterpiece, it is the greatest gift we can give to God who is honored by this expression of our admiration for His chosen creature.

Today, in this annual meeting of all of the active members of the Legion of Mary within the Archdiocese--this meeting known as the Acies--we are granted a special audience with our Queen-commander-in-chief. The official Handbook of the Legion calls the Acies the "principle function of the Legion." We come together not just in small groups of platoons (praesidia) but in a full "army set in battle array" (acies) in order to renew our fealty to Mary not only as individuals, but as much as possible as a group. The renewal of our fealty is expressed in the form of dedication or consecration of ourselves to her totally, since a Legionary if anything must be truly "dedicated" in the fullest sense of that word. The Handbook stipulates that the subject of the address should be the significance of the consecration to Our Lady. But it may come as a shock to some that elsewhere in the Handbook (specifically, page 332) it is stated explicitly that the words of the brief formula that you will utter here today are meant to be a condensed form of the total consecration to Mary as proposed by St. Louis DeMontfort--the Montfortian consecration. Of course the ideal way to make the consecration is after the 33-day preparation suggested by St. Louis DeMontfort. But the formula in its condensed expression, that is to be pronounced by each Legionary today, is: "I am all thine, my Queen, my Mother, and all that I have is thine."

Notice that the word "all" is used twice in this abbreviated formula of the Legionary's consecration to Our Lady. The first time it is used, it refers to the constitutive elements within our human makeup, that is, our body and soul with all their respective faculties. The second time "all" is used it refers to all of one's possessions--temporal possessions, such as food, clothing, house, car, furniture; and spiritual possessions, including actual and sanctifying graces, merits and indulgences. Thus the totality of this dedication is seen to be implicitly contained in this brief formula.

Some of you may have been already aware of the fact that your consecration today is Montfortian; some may be thrilled to learn of this fact, and others (let us hope not too many) may be disheartened to hear of it because of a resistance that you may somehow feel toward the Montfortian consecration as described in St. Louis DeMontfort's two works on the subject, "The True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary," and "The Secret of Mary." But regardless of your attitude toward it, it would be quite natural that a number of questions should arise in your mind about this consecration, particularly in its connection with the Legion of Mary. In explaining the subject as the Handbook requires, we are fulfilling the urgings of our beloved Holy Pontiff of late memory, Pope Pius XII, who said in his address to the Belgian Marian Congress: "Weigh well, dear sons and daughters, the full importance of this act of Consecration to Mary and the obligations it involves." With this word of encouragement to investigation, he proceeds to urge all, even children, to make the Consecration, provided they have the requisite sincerity.

The first thing to understand about this Consecration is that it is not really a consecration of oneself to Mary, but rather to God through Mary; or to Mary immediately and to God mediately. The full understanding of this one fact will solve a multitude of difficulties. Another fact, more of historical interest, is

that the total consecration known as the "True Devotion" was not invented by St. Louis DeMontfort, but only scientized by him and marvelously developed theologically under his inspiration. St. John Damascene, centuries before, proclaimed it in his famous sermon on the Assumption of Mary, when he exclaimed, "We consecrate to thee Mary, our mind, our soul, our body, our entire self." Thomas a Kempis employed it in his "Sermon to Novices"; St. Bonaventure referred to it in glowing words in his "Speculum"; St. Ephrem practiced it long before DeMontfort lived; also St. Anselm, St. Bernadine, and St. Leonard of Port Maurice. After DeMontfort's time we find it enthusiastically endorsed by St. Alphonsus Liguori, Blessed Peter Julian Eymard, the saintly Cure of Ars--the patron of diocesan clergy--, St. Gabriel, the model of seminarians, St. Therese of Liseux, the Little Flower, and many other saints.

But if one should prefer to ignore the example of the saints in the practice of the True Devotion, it is rather more difficult to evade the compelling force of the example and encouragement from the Holy See. It seems nothing short of incredible that anyone calling himself a good Catholic can set himself diametrically against something that has the warmly enthusiastic approval of six popes. It is hard to find a logical reason why one would shy away from this devotion which Pope Pius IX proclaimed the best manner of practicing devotion to Mary and the one most acceptable to her. It is hard to see how one can overlook Pope Leo XIII's granting of a plenary indulgence to those who make DeMontfort's Act of Consecration or the fact that he renewed his own consecration on his death bed, after having beatified DeMontfort himself as the seal of approval of his method. It is difficult to see how any Catholic can deride a book like "The True Devotion" when Pope Pius X granted the Apostolic Blessing to all who read it. It is even more difficult to understand how any Catholic can ignore the promptings of his encyclical "Ad Diem Illum" which is almost a repetition of the ideas of DeMontfort and a paraphrasing of his words--in many instances direct quotes. I couldn't imagine anyone hoping the prayer of Pope Benedict XIV would not be fulfilled for them when he prayed that the devotion would "spread far and revive the Christian spirit in an ever-increasing number of souls." Is it possible that one could be unimpressed with the fact that Pope Pius XI practiced the devotion throughout his life and had almost memorized the book, "The True Devotion?" How could one turn a deaf ear to the many remarks favoring the Consecration from the lips of Pope Pius XII? Would one dare challenge the studied opinions of great Cardinals such as Vaughn, Mercier, O'Connell, Lauri, or De Berulle who propagated the devotion zealously? Can one put aside easily the mass of theological evidence in favor of the devotion compiled by such great modern theologians as Garrigou-Lagrange, Tanquerey, or Lemkuhl? Can one ignore the fact that not one reputable theologian has been able to find a single theological defect in the Montfortian way of sanctity through Mary? Is it without significance that the Montfortian Consecration is found in the Enchiridion Indulgentiarum--the official collection of prayers indulgenced by the Holy See? With the evidence overwhelmingly in favor of the devotion from the Church's standpoint, isn't it incredibly strange that individual Catholics still feel that they are sufficiently informed in the matter to consider it a defective method of approaching God? They may mean well, and be very sincere Catholics. Their souls are without malice, but not without ignorance.

It is easy to see how a person might be uninformed about the devotion and its many supports from the Church, but members of the Legion of Mary should not be in that category of persons. A careful study of the official Handbook of the Legion will certainly convince any Legionary of the importance of the Consecration in his or her life as a member. As a matter of historical fact, the Legion originated from the Montfortian devotion. On December 6, 1956, Mr. Frank Duff, the founder of the Legion of Mary, made this statement: "The Legion of Mary owes,

you might say, everything to the Montfortian devotion." In reference to St. Louis DeMontfort, the Handbook echoes that remark in these words: "It can be safely asserted that no saint has played a greater part in the development of the Legion than he. The Handbook is full of his spirit. The prayers re-echo his very words. He is really the tutor of the Legion."

In view of the fact that the abbreviated Montfortian Consecration is the whole object of this Acies meeting, and in view of the fact that the Acies itself is the "principle function of the Legion," the inescapable conclusion is that the total dedication to Mary should be the pervading element in Legionary mentality. And yet it is not formally obligatory, for if it were, it would substantially reduce its merits as a free and generous act.

The Consecration fits into the whole apostolic plan of the Legion, whose immediate objective is "to bring Mary into the world as the infallible means of winning the world to Jesus." But elsewhere in the handbook we read: "The Legionary without Mary in his heart can play no part in this. He is divorced from the Legion purpose. He is an unarmed soldier." On the other hand, "in intense union with her lie marvels of sanctification and an incredible source of power over the souls of others." Now this union of soul of the Legionary with Mary calls for nothing short of a total consecration to her, becoming so intimately united with her in this self-giving that he "breathes Mary as the body breathes air," to use the phrase of DeMontfort. That is why Dom Chautard, the author of the classical Soul of the Apostolate urges the Montfortian Consecration to assure a successful apostolate. Or, in the words of the Handbook: "True devotion to Mary must comprise the service of souls." On April 26, 1958 Pope Pius XII said substantially the same when speaking to the Italian Sodalists. It is further of significance that the explanation of the Montfortian Consecration in the Handbook of the Legion is in the Chapter entitled "The Duty of Legionaries Toward Mary."

Many persons, even Legionaries, make the Consecration as a mere passing act of devotion. Such persons do not truly understand the meaning of the Consecration. The Legion Handbook emphasizes that the Consecration "consists principally in the subsequent living of that Consecration. The True Devotion must represent not an act but a state."

Adopting DeMontfort's method of interior life with Mary, the Handbook takes up his formula of "Through, With, In, and For Mary," and applies it to the apostolic life of the individual Legionary. Here are a few sentences from the Handbook to illustrate that fact: "The Legion apostolate operates through Mary." "Souls are not approached except with Mary." "To tell Legionaries to immerse themselves in their work is the same thing as to urge them to bury themselves in Mary." "The Legionaries work for Mary, quite irrespective of the simplicity or the difficulty of the task." Thus the spirit of the Legion is Marian and Montfortian. The founder, Mr. Frank Duff, wrote that the study of the True Devotion of DeMontfort should be done by both active and auxiliary members, and without this, they cannot enter into the spirit of the Legion of Mary.

I think we can best fulfill Pope Pius XII's injunction to investigate this devotion, by considering and answering the more common objections that are proposed against it. The most common objection is to be found in the adverse connotations of "slavery" that forms the context of the devotion as propounded by DeMontfort. This is solved by pointing out that DeMontfort meant to emphasize the denotation rather than the usual connotation of slavery; he meant to emphasize the factor of dependence, not that of degradation; the accent was meant to be on submission, not subjugation. Of the three kinds of slavery, that of nature,

compulsion and love, he excluded the first two, and used it as an honorary title as St. Paul did when speaking to his converts as newly made "slaves of God." However, the Montfortian devotion admits of a refinement by consecration to Mary as a child rather than a slave, since the main element of dependence is found in childhood as well as slavery, and many find it easier thus to incorporate the more basic element of love in this approach. Another common objection is that if one gives Mary all one's spiritual possessions that can be transferred, he will be empty-handed at the day of judgment if she had decided to distribute them to someone else. If such a situation should really occur, we must also remember that Mary, too, will be at the final judgment. Could anyone with even the weakest faith think that Mary would be at that time forgetful of a soul that had been generous enough with her as to give her everything? It is precisely this element of boundless confidence in Mary's goodness that makes the devotion so meritorious.

Other objectors complain that if by the Consecration they leave to Mary the authority to distribute their spiritual possessions, they can no longer make spiritual bouquets or pray for particular persons of their own choice or for particular intentions. Spiritual bouquets and particular intentions in prayers of petition are not excluded from one consecrated to Mary, but are to be encouraged in these souls. The point to be emphasized here is that the promise of prayer for someone and the particular intentions requested are all to be submitted, explicitly or implicitly, to the will of Mary, which of course is exactly parallel with the will of God; in effect, the prayer is: "I want this or that favor for this or that person, but only if you approve of it, Mary." A soul consecrated to Mary has a much better hope of having his prayers answered than a soul who is not thus on such intimate terms with her.

Those who have made the "Heroic Act" of surrendering all their indulgences past, present and future for the souls in purgatory, frequently feel that for them the Montfortian devotion would be superfluous. A careful study of the Montfortian Consecration will show that it is far more extensive than the Heroic Act, which, though a very commendable offering in itself, is one by which only indulgences are relinquished, whereas the soul consecrated in the Montfortian way relinquishes not only indulgences (remission of purgatorial punishment) but also merits (rewards of increased glory in Heaven) as spiritual possessions given to Mary to redistribute if she so wills. (some merits--de condigno merits--are non-transferable but these are given to Mary, not to redistribute but to keep safely in her custody and to multiply in value.) In giving all of our indulgences in the Heroic Act we are giving only a part of our spiritual possessions, while in the Montfortian dedication we are giving everything.

Likewise, to those who claim that the baptismal promises imply complete dedication it may be answered that even after adult baptism, the person reserves the right to keep his merits for himself, but not after the Montfortian Consecration.

To those who wonder why the dedication to God must be through Mary, the answer is that Christ came to us through her, and we should, in His design of Providence, go back to Him through her also. God the Father did not give His Son to the world except through Mary, God the Son did not take on a human nature with which to suffer the redemptive act of Calvary, except through the body of Mary, and God the Holy Ghost does not dispense His graces except through His spouse, Mary, for which reason the Church teaches that she is the Mediatrix of all graces. Who then could better take charge of our spiritual and temporal goods than Mary, and who better intercede for us than Mary, who as God's magnifying glass ("My soul doth magnify the Lord") magnifies the value of all our good works, prayers and sacrifices?

Others object that total dedication to Mary, doing everything in, with, through and for her, would detract us from the love of Jesus. Nothing could be farther from the truth, for Mary's whole purpose is to lead souls to God, not away from Him. Mary is like the direction signs along a road; they do not distract the driver from the right road, but rather keep him safely on it. Close union with Mary will keep us on the "Way" which is Christ in seeking our ultimate destination, union with God in heaven.

Some object that their own way of honoring Mary is enough, and that there is no need for following only the Montfortian way. With regard to this, it is all a matter of generosity. Anything less than the Montfortian Consecration well lived is not a total dedication, but only a partial one, and therefore less generous. Without this total gift of self, a definite limit is put on one's love and generosity towards Mary.

Finally, some object that they are not worthy of such a sublime dedication. This is one of the devil's most subtle machinations in making one think himself unworthy of True Devotion, thus fermenting a poisonous Jansenistic mentality. Not holiness, but a sincere desire for holiness is required, since the Montfortian devotion is a means to attain holiness, not an end in itself.

St. Louis DeMontfort prophesied that the devil would furiously try everything in his power to thwart the success of this divinely inspired devotion, for he knows that Mary is the woman whose heel will crush his head as foretold in Genesis. Even good and sincere people will be misled to oppose this, being ignorant of the teachings and examples of Popes and the mind of the Church in the matter. Let us not fall victim to these insidious machinations of the devil by allowing ourselves to be deceived by any objections to the Montfortian way to God through Mary.

Even among those who have a fairly deep appreciation of this Consecration there are very few who appreciate its extensiveness when applied to the spiritualizing of their everyday activities. Consider a few of its many applications: Wouldn't it be much easier to avoid uncharitable thoughts or distractions if you were constantly aware of the fact that your mind and your imagination were dedicated to Our Blessed Mother? Wouldn't it be comparatively easy to avoid undesirable memories if you knew that your memory was consecrated to Mary? Wouldn't it be easier to avoid wasting time if you were continuously aware of the fact that your time really belonged to Mary? Even headaches would be easier to sustain in a spirit of generous mortification, if you were continuously aware of the consoling fact that your head, as a member of your body, was really a possession of Mary's, and that she was multiplying the value of, and applying the fruits of that suffering and all of your suffering, ~~whether~~, ~~physical~~, mental or spiritual. Even maintaining personal cleanliness and a neatness in your surroundings would be more easily accomplished when you realize that you are the chosen custodian of all these things which really belong to Mary since you have dedicated them all to Mary. Wouldn't there be less monotony in your daily tasks, whether these be at home in the office, the factory or the school, if you knew you were doing it all for God under the aegis of Mary?

There are five things I would ask of you today, my dear Legionaries. First, study thoroughly this Montfortian way to sanctity. The more you learn, the more you will see that there is much more yet to learn about it. Second, make the Act of Consecration wholeheartedly, not just as an exterior act, even a frequently renewed act. Make it not only today in its abbreviated form, but with the full 33-day preparation suggested by DeMontfort, and renew it at least annually with that same preparation. Third, live it interiorly and continuously, with a true Marian spirit. DeMontfort said that most would make it only exteriorly, and very few will advance through the four stages of its interior practice. Fourth, defend it as valiant

soldiers of Mary's Legion. Fifth, spread it with a prudent but fiery zeal.

If you do these things, especially by incorporating it into the whole of your interior life, you will fall in love with God's holy Mother with a love that you never dreamed humanly possible.

A final remark as an ultimate refinement of the devotion. The Montfortian Consecration is not really a devotion in the fullest sense of that word; it is a manner of practicing devotion to Mary. The most perfect Marian devotion is the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the synthesis of all Marian devotions as Pope Pius XII stated in his encyclical "Haurietis Aquas." Practice the best Marian devotion in the best manner, by coupling the two. Consecrate yourself totally to Mary under the title of her Immaculate Heart.

No one is better equipped to show you the secrets of sanctity than the world's greatest expert among all creatures, Mary. But to learn these intimate secrets we must be on very intimate terms with her. Unite yourself to her by total dedication in all that it implies, and draw vast oceans of grace from her who is "full of grace" — the holiest, the sweetest, the loveliest, the purest, the most gracious, most virtuous, most magnificent creature that ever flowed from the bountiful creative hand of God!

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Sweet Heart of Mary Be My Salvation!

